LITTLE FOOTPRINTS
ON THE
OLD CHURCH PATH

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A Memoir of a Christian Child.

HE, BEING MADE PERFECT IN A SHORT TIME, FULFILLED A LONG TIME:
FOR HIS SOUL PLEASED THE LORD: THEREFORE HASTED HE TO TAKE HIM AWAY FROM AMONG THE WICKED.

Wisdom iv. 13, 14.

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PREFACE.

WHATEVER claim the following memoir may have to the distinction of publication, or whatever interest for the members of the Church in general, the responsibility of bringing it so prominently forward does not rest upon her who wrote it.

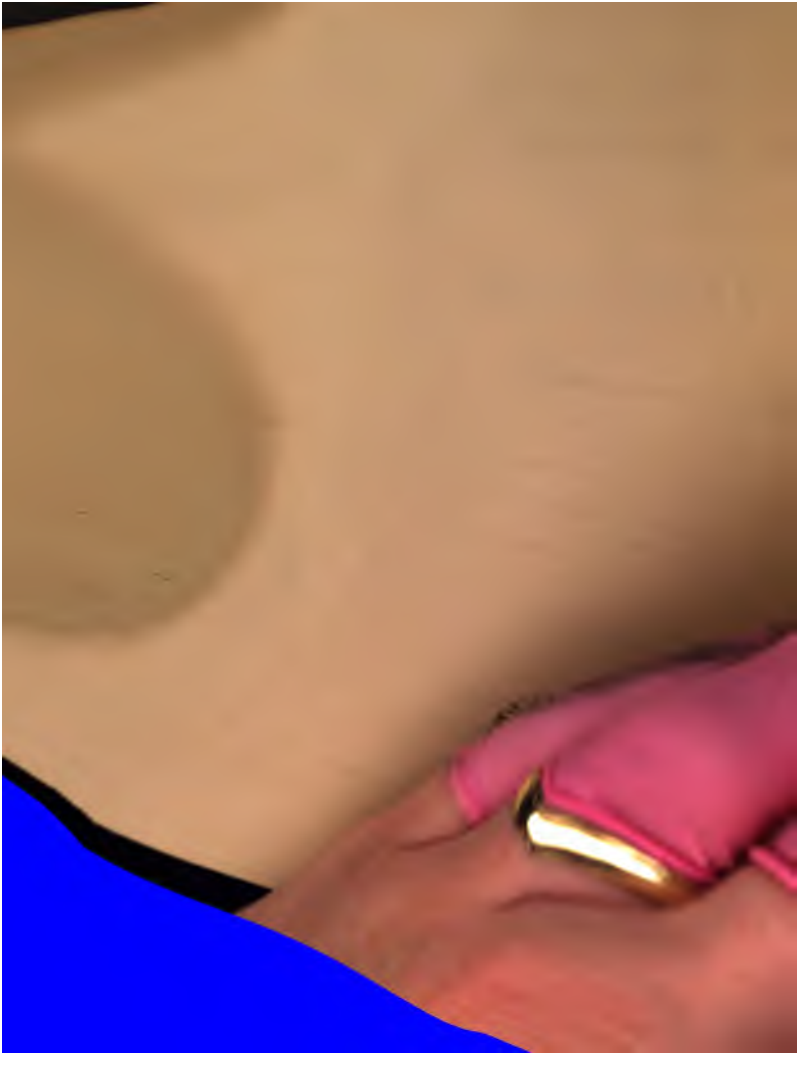
The manuscript fell into the hands of a friend who suggested its publication, and his opinion was supported by that of another Clergyman[a] much interested in education, and who was enabled to confirm its practical truthfulness and reality by ob-

[a] The Rev. William Sewell, B.D., Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, who has kindly permitted this use of his name.

servations of his own. The memoir was written whilst the mother's heart, wounded but not broken, cast down yet full of comfort, was pondering on the ways of God towards herself and all around her, as well as towards that little sainted one whom He had called so early home. With a spirit thus impressed that God's immediate presence was in all those hallowed scenes, that His voice might be heard, speaking with no ordinary emphasis, by all who had been privileged to witness love so pure, hope so stedfast, and faith so triumphant, this little record was penned—to meet no eyes but those of her own immediate family, or of such friends as could sympathize with her chastened joys and hopeful sorrows.

She would gladly have refrained from bringing into prominence subjects so interwoven with her heart's deepest affections; and have adhered to her original intention of confining the little narrative to those who so well knew the truth of every circumstance it records, and would love to trace in it the features of one, whom, though taken from them for a season, they cannot look upon as lost to them for ever.

But when it was represented that such an example might be blest to others also; that it was a striking testimony to the excellent wisdom and practical utility of the Church's system; above all, that it might point out to some *Christian Mother*, how she might lead her children along the same



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good path of Church teaching, in which she had been so happily permitted to guide her little one; she felt it her duty to forego her own feelings, if, by so doing, she might benefit others, and bear witness to the truth.

Whitsuntide, 1853.

LITTLE FOOTPRINTS ON THE OLD CHURCH PATH.

SEVERAL of my friends, who witnessed or heard of my dear George's last illness, have remarked that I must have trained his mind wonderfully, to have effected so much at the age of five years and four months.

But, indeed, it is not *I* that have trained him, *but the Church.* I did nothing but what every mother may, if she can only bring herself to obey, as well as to teach. God's grace was given, and He blessed the humble spirit seeking to be guided by the means of His own appointment.

Some chapters in Sewell's "Christian Morals," which I read about three years ago, gave me the most definite idea of the way in which the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration gives the tone to the whole Christian training from the first infancy—that it is not only to be *believed* as a matter of faith, but *acted* upon through our whole earthly struggle.

"We must keep our early promise,
We must guard what He has given,
Till the Lord who loved and saved us,
Take us to His home in heaven."

HYMNS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

It may seem a strange confession; but, I am sure, my dear children have educated *me* fully as much as I have *them*. *They*

made me study that I might find how to teach; and their simple, undoubting faith, has shewn *me* how a Christian ought to learn. From my early years I had known the doctrine of regeneration in Holy Baptism, and that the Church was our safest and surest guide; but I was ignorant of the practical lesson to be learnt from both these truths. They had no influence on my daily life.

With my three elder children I began as best I could, learning as I went along; and when a good explanation of any subject struck me, in books or sermons, directly imparting it to them in easy language. By this method they acquired a good supply of religious instruction; and I became con-

vinced that the difficulty under which children labour, is not that their minds are unequal to the subject, but that their powers of language are limited. Speak in words they understand, and take care they do understand them, and I have never found the doctrine, or idea, or sentiment, which they could not grasp in their pure and childish hearts, as well as any person of four times their age and wisdom. Of course I mean for all purposes of faith and practice.

But it is of my darling departed George that I wish to write: to impress upon my own mind and those of my other children in after years, the sweet example to be learnt from his memory.

He was indeed a lowly follower of our blessed Lord, and a real Churchman, for his life was guided by the rule laid down for us in the Prayer-Book as the explanation of the Bible. There were four years between him and his youngest sister, and in those four years I had learnt much, and was more qualified to act upon a systematic plan. That plan I determined, by God's help, should be the one prescribed by the Church in her yearly course.

George was three years old on the 18th of September, 1848. A birthday is always a treat to children, and he was very happy. He perfectly understood that on that day three years before, he had been born a little helpless baby, and we talked about how

weak and tender he was. Then I told him that on the 30th of October he was taken to church and baptized; and that, when the day came, I would tell him about all that was then done for him. He was obliged to wait, and thus learnt a good lesson of patience. And when allowed to hear the full account of how he went to church, and who carried him; who were his godfathers and godmothers; how he was sprinkled with clear water; and how he was made the child of God, and had Jesus Christ's own mark put on his forehead; how he went to church with only his father's name, but that he there obtained the Christian name of George-Frederick, the interest he took was wonderful. He

was himself the actor in the scene. I then told him he must be good, and love God, as he was His child, and that he might now understand why he said "Our Father" in his prayers. I then promised that on Christmas day (our Lord's own birthday), he should hear about *His* being born. The baptismal story lasted till then; and by that time he began to understand a little of the promises made on his behalf; of the grace bestowed, and the promises of future assistance made to him by God.

Then came Christmas, with its tree, and its wreaths, and its presents; but he knew that all these pleasures were only to do honour to the birthday of Jesus; and the promised story of His birth filled his little

mind with anxiety and expectation. He did indeed enjoy it. I made it interesting to a child by dwelling upon the whole scene very minutely, till he seemed to see it before him—the angels, the stable, the shepherds, the pure virgin mother. And he understood that it was *his own Lord and Saviour* who was born a little helpless baby, that he might some day be allowed to go to live with Him in heaven.

This was a happy season—so full of interest. In twelve days came the Wise Men, and on the 2nd of February the Presentation in the Temple. Then a long pause, only broken by the Annunciation, for what had he to do with Lent? But the old stories of Baptism and Christmas

kept him happy, and he looked forward to Good-Friday. With what a burst of agony did he hear of the Crucifixion! His little heart seemed breaking. He was comforted however, by the promise of Easter; though obliged to *wait* for the story. How glad I am to think his young mind was never burdened with too much at a time. He knew the reason why I refused to yield to his earnest entreaty to "go on." He knew that his Lord waited in the grave, and that he must wait, so he did not worry as some children would, and I was not tempted to tax his little memory too much at once. Without the rule of the Church I could not have resisted.

After the Ascension he heard but little

fresh—of St. John Baptist, and occasionally of one of the Saints in the New; sometimes of Joseph and Samuel and others in the Old Testament. But the Crucifixion always, till his *death*, continued the favourite.

The next year of his life went on the same: still the proper days were devoted to their subjects. At other times he was allowed to choose his own story. He then heard of many of the miracles. The baptismal responsibilities were ever the foundation, because the sacrament was ordained by Christ Himself. He always bent at the Name of Jesus, because at His Name "every knee shall bow." He loved the Bible, and was much distressed that any

thing should be laid upon it, because it was God's word. He knew that light was made on the first day of the week; and that on the same day Jesus rose again to remove the darkness of the world and of the tomb; that Adam was made on Friday, and lost the world: that Jesus died on Friday, and saved the world; that woman first sinned, and that woman was permitted to be the mother of Christ, and that woman brought the first news of the Resurrection.

After the fire in our house he made great progress. From that time he always liked to say his prayers by me, and that I should lay my hand upon his head and ask God to bless him. He always made me say "Defend us from fire" at night; and, "We

thank Thee for defending us from fire," in the morning; and I also prayed that the grace of God might help him to be His faithful soldier and servant each day. He knew that this was a prayer which had been offered up for him at his baptism. For the last few months he always came to me in the same reverent manner before going to church, for he said he found it much easier to sit quiet there, after he had asked God's assistance. There was such a deep feeling connected with all these religious duties, that he could not endure the presence of others, and it was a severe trial if he was unable to be with me alone. When illness prevented my leaving the warm room where the rest of the family

were assembled, he always led me into a dark corner at the opposite end, that no one else might hear: yet reserve formed no part of his character, which was quite in keeping with the open expression of his countenance, his tall noble figure and manly bearing.

We often spoke of heaven and of the holy angels, and he knew there was a place called hell, but we did not often talk of it, for love was a sufficient guide; and he needed no more fear of God, than the extreme reverence he seemed almost intuitively to feel for Him, and all connected with His service.

When Georgie was between four and five years old, he began to learn the Cate-

chism. There was no difficulty in teaching it to him; for, besides his wonderful memory, he already had the advantage of knowing so much of the doctrines, that instead of the words conveying no meaning to his mind, as is often the case with children, he saw easily what was meant by them the moment they were explained. The other children had found great difficulty in learning the Apostles' Creed perfectly: though acquainted with every clause, for a long time they often hesitated as to which was to come next. But the oft-repeated story of the life and death of Christ made dear Georgie so familiar with the order in which the clauses *must come*, that, with him, it was literally the *symbole du*

foi, or in other words "the Creed." It was not that his youngest sister (who was most puzzled by this difficulty) was not acquainted with the whole history, but it had not been impressed on her mind *in such regular order, and confirmed by the days on which the events are commemorated.*

The children always begin school by reading the second lesson for the day, and a few of the Church prayers. Georgie was often present, but from about five years old, he was regularly one of the little congregation, taking his part in reading with as much solemnity as a man. Thus he learnt many of the collects by heart without trouble, and was so perfect in them, that neither in the severe pain of his illness, nor at last

when his mind was almost wandering, did he ever forget a word. If he once began a prayer, he struggled on till it was finished, though he often paused for want of breath. When nurse was ill, a little before his last sickness, he always, night and morning, went up to her bedside to read the lesson, and the prayer for the sick which he had long used for me. How earnestly he soon afterwards said it for himself!

"Oh! say not, dream not, heavenly notes
To childish ears are vain,
That the young mind at random floats,
And cannot reach the strain.

* * * * * *

And if some tones be false or low,
What are all prayers beneath
But cries of babes, that cannot know
Half the deep thought they breathe?"

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

After his return from Worthing, where he had the *scarlatina*, his little mind continued to unfold so rapidly, that I felt convinced no common destiny was before him. It was not only on religious subjects that its power shewed itself. I often said to myself: "What if this child be soon to leave us?" or "What, if he lives, will be his lot? It will not be a low one in the world; and, with his strongly serious tone of mind, he may be the means of much good." The measles gave another shock to his frame, and added still more to his desire for heavenly things. He could now read well; and, as soon as his one hour of school was over, he often came to read his favourite last chapter of St. John's Gospel to me,

or some of the Church prayers. This I never proposed, fearing he might lose his reverence. If he forgot when to kneel or stand, he used to say, "Is this a prayer?" or "Is this praise?" He now took particular notice of the days of the week, and would come to me and say, "It is Wednesday; tell me about the wicked Judas betraying his Lord;" then he would ask for the story of Joseph, and notice how he was also betrayed and sold by his brethren. The same with the other days of the week: all with him told of Jesus Christ. He also frequently asked what it was o'clock; and, if near twelve or three, would beg to hear about the Crucifixion, or the death of Christ; as the time might be.

Oh! was there any formality in all this? Had not our Mother Church, as a tender parent, led him step by step along the road his Saviour trod, till his Heavenly Master saw him strong enough to bear a portion of His Cross?—and then, on the very day and hour sanctified by His own most precious death, He received him back unto Himself, almost as pure as when his original sin was cleansed in the holy Sacrament of Baptism.

Some little time before his death he said to me with great earnestness: "Oh! my own, dear, dear mother, I do love you better than any one on earth!" He paused with great reverence; and looking up said: "But I love Jesus Christ much

more, for He died that I might live always with Him."

At this time he was well, though not very strong, and as happy and contented as a child could be. I have often thought of this since, as a proof that it was not only to be released from such intense suffering that he looked with pleasure on death. Indeed he was frequently overheard repeating to himself the lines in his little hymn:

> "We must not cry too bitterly
> Over the happy dead."

I NOW come to a different scene. Oh! how sad and suffering; but how full of comfort and peace! Our precious youngest child, that used to be so joyous and happy, whose young voice sounded so sweetly about the house, whose bright smile was scarcely ever obscured, whose merry laugh rang so clearly, and whose engaging ways were the admiration of rich and poor:—this little child was indeed changed in one single day, from all this show of life and spirit into a little stricken agonized object:—so altered, that the doating parents looked in vain in his little pinched features for the resemblance of their child. Yet this I feel was well for us in the end.

I am sure that almost from the first I scarcely thought of him as *my child.* To me he seemed like a lamb laid on the altar, waiting the sacrificial knife; as a loved treasure, dedicated to God; as even then claimed by Him; though, to bring our minds to resign him by degrees, he was still permitted to linger a short time, till we had learnt the lesson how a Christian ought to die.

He was taken ill on Thursday, January 23rd, and lived till Friday at 3 o'clock, February 7th.

The first evening we hoped that he was relieved by sickness, and went to bed without much fear of not seeing him better in the morning. Soon after, he was taken with dreadful agonies, which lasted, with

only slight intermissions, until a short time before his death. During the first night nurse asked what she could do to help him? He said:

"You can help me as I did you, when you were ill. You can *pray for me.* You got better, God heard my prayers."

On one of the early days of his illness, I told him of the woman of Canaan, who came to our Lord in behalf of her daughter, and explained to him how God did not always *appear* to hear our prayers at once; but, that not one of them was really lost; and that, when He saw the right time was come for granting them, He either did what we asked, or gave us something better still. This was in answer to his question, "Why

God did not make him better, when he and all of us prayed so very often." He took the explanation, as he took every thing, with the most undoubting confidence in the love of God, and never again fancied his prayers were not heard. He said, one night, he should like to die and be a little angel in heaven, and then he should come and watch over us all. He never seemed to think that death could part us. Sometimes he would say:

"Did Jesus suffer more than I do?"

When told, "Yes," and that He had no comforts by Him, nothing but mockery and enemies, and that even His Mother and His dear friend could not reach Him to give Him drink, he said:

"Then I will not cry, for my own dear mamma can kiss me." This he often seemed to dwell upon with pleasure, saying when I did something for him:

"Mamma, the Blessed Virgin could not reach her Son."

On Thursday, January 30th, a large blister was put on the side of the stomach; and the next morning another on the other side. From this time his Father and I lost every vestige of hope. I do not think there was ever perhaps quite so much pain, but he was, to all appearance, still more ill. He spoke but little, but liked to be told stories: from this time nothing but Bible stories. I generally had to relate the Crucifixion two or three times a day: always

about three o'clock; and he often asked if the hour was come;

"You know what I mean—tell me." If any one else said,

"What did you say, dear?" he answered,

"Mamma knows."

The last Sunday of his life he was dreadfully restless, and could not lie still a moment, unless I was speaking to him. He could distinguish the lowest tone of my voice, and he made me tell him from the Supper at Bethany, on the evening of the Sabbath, quite in order, till the Ascension; not in a cursory manner, but dwelling upon every circumstance, pointing out what were the causes of the different actions, how the

prophecies were all fulfilled by Christ, and that He could at any time have given up His merciful purpose, if He had thought of His own sufferings instead of our salvation; but that if He had not suffered all that was appointed for Him, we could never have been saved from our sins, or have gone to dwell with Him in heaven. During this, he often faintly whispered,

"Oh! go on: how I do love Jesus!"—"I should like to go to heaven."

On Tuesday, the 3rd of February, about one o'clock, nurse and I noticed a change come over his countenance. His eyes looked larger than ever, and all at once he asked to wash his hands. For the first time during his illness he tried to do it himself, and

passed his little trembling wet hands all over his face. As soon as he had done it, he said,

"I wish God would let me die, for I'm not afraid. You would not mind: would you?"

I could not speak, but nurse answered, "I should be sorry to lose you, dear; but it must be as God pleases."

He replied, "I should like it very much, for I should go to heaven."

After this he told me to lie down by him; and he became quite quiet for a long time. About three, a friend came and read some of the prayers in the Visitation of the Sick. The dying child never spoke, but kept his large eyes fixed on his face with

the deepest attention. Almost half an hour after he was gone, he said,

"Mamma, why did he not say, 'The grace of our Lord—?'"

I told him that he was a Clergyman, and so could give him the blessing appointed by the Church. He said, "Oh." Soon after this he began to doze, and when the medical attendant came, about four o'clock, he told me there was a change taking place. He came again at six, and his partner at eight, and both together at ten. The former stayed all night. He seemed sinking slowly, but perceptibly. We all stayed with him till past twelve, when, on being told he might last in the same quiet state for many hours, I went to bed, thinking never

to see him in this world again. But it was ordained otherwise. In the morning, when the doctors came, they told us a change had taken place in the symptoms, but that it was not for immediate death, but for the typhoid character of the disease, and that the drowsiness was caused by pressure on the brain. He experienced great restlessness all day and night, though at times he dozed a little.

The next morning a large blister was applied to the back of the neck. It drew well, but did no good, nor did it give him any trouble. He never mentioned it after the first. This morning and all the night before there had been frequent faintings, so long and overpowering, that several times

he seemed going. He was quite sensible when spoken to, though his mind often wandered. While the medical gentleman and several other persons were in the room, he commenced saying, "Blessed Lord"—the collect he always said when he read the Holy Scriptures. His little treasured Bible was lying on the bed, and I put it by him. He laid a little wasted hand upon it. He did not know so many were in the room, or he would not have prayed before them; his heart was far away.

Soon after, he looked at me and put up his finger and beckoned, saying, "Mamma, come." I leant over him, and he put both his arms round my neck, and held me fast, kissing me most earnestly. Afterwards it

was only occasionally that he spoke. He often mumbled to himself. The children's kind governess once asked if he spoke? He said,

"Not to you." She said,

"Were you speaking to God?" He answered, "Yes."

The impression of approaching death in the little sufferer was all from within himself. Our faithful attendants fully obeyed my repeated requests that nothing might be said to excite his feelings. Not one tear was shed in the room, nor a word spoken of our own sorrow. And he took no leave, yet I know he meant it. On Wednesday evening the exhaustion was so great and the breathing so faint, that every few mi-

nutes I leant over him with a trembling fear that the spirit had fled. At last he opened his eyes, and said, very feebly, "Mamma, read my hymn,

'The rich man did of Pilate crave.'"

The book of "Hymns for Little Children," from which he had learnt so much, was on the bed. As I was turning over the leaves he reminded me,

"It is number 13, page 33."

When I had finished he said,

"Now the next; it begins,

'Up in Heaven, up in Heaven.'"

I read very slowly and distinctly, and he sank again into the same state of exhaustion. I would not have missed that

little incident for worlds. It seemed that God Himself was teaching my dying child to express his own faith, and to sustain mine. On Thursday, at midnight, all his beautiful hair, which had always fallen in its own way over to one side, however much he rolled about, this treasured hair was cut off. He was not conscious of it. Blisters were put behind each ear, but they never raised a mark. The hand of death was on him. He never moved again, but lay all night as he was placed, upon his back. When I went up in the morning, he appeared quite insensible, though he took a spoonful of wine occasionally. The medical men tried to arouse him, by speaking and tapping his cheek. I said, "Let me try,"

and said, "Georgie, my darling, precious child." He flushed quite red, and we thought his lips moved. A few minutes later he took no notice of my voice. We were now only watching for the last gasp. The breath continued with a slow, even breathing, till about half past two, when there was a change, and we all stood close to the bed; the faithful servants, the governess, the two aunts, the father and mother. The breath grew slower and slower,—a long pause, and then again. Several times we thought it over. A bird at the window sang out clearly. He had often talked of that bird coming to him.

At length the last came; a little before three. All the morning his eyes had been

turned towards that heaven to which he was going. And now he was gone! I felt sure he must have lingered a few moments to watch those he so loved. We knelt down, and his dear father, with a trembling voice, read the chapter in Corinthians out of the dear little Bible. I mean the one appointed for the funeral service.

> "They are not all together now,
> For some are dead and gone before,
> And some are striving still on earth,
> Their trial is not o'er."
>
> HYMNS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

"I HOLD it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it when I sorrow most,
'Tis better to have lov'd and lost,
Than never to have lov'd at all."

TENNYSON.

And is this all that now remains,
  Of the fair child I held so dear:
The fond remembrance in my heart,
  The little braided ring I wear?

But on that ring there is a shield,
  Which speaks of holy faith to me,
And the light circle of his hair,
  Is emblem of eternity.

I THINK not of my child as dead,
  Nor fancy him beneath the sod;
It was the spirit that I lov'd,
  And that lov'd spirit dwells with God.

I train'd him here as best I might,
  And gave him what to me was given;
He learnt to love his Lord on earth,
  Then went to live with Him in heaven.

I hope I am not wrong in this,
  But when I picture to my mind
The path my Saviour trod, I see
  His little foot-prints close behind.

He was like sunshine in our home,
  A creature full of life and grace;
We often look to see him back,
  But only feel his vacant place.

We miss him with his glowing smile,
  At every morn's returning light;
We miss him at the noon-day meal,
  And in the loving words "Good night."

But most I miss him in his prayers,
  So trustful, though so humbly said,
And in the blessing I implor'd,
  Each evening on his infant head.

THERE is no portrait of our George;
  We have a sketch of all the rest:
It matters not! he lives enshrin'd
  Within his mother's loving breast.

His little Bible, day by day,
  Reveals for me its heavenly store,
And, thinking of my angel boy,
  I love its teaching more and more.

I often pray'd his filial love
  Might cheer my weary journey home,
The prayer was heard—he went before,
  And beckon'd fondly, "Mother, come."

Thou only Hope, Thou only Stay,
  On Whom the sinner may rely!
O Jesu! train me how to live;
  O Saviour! teach me how to die.